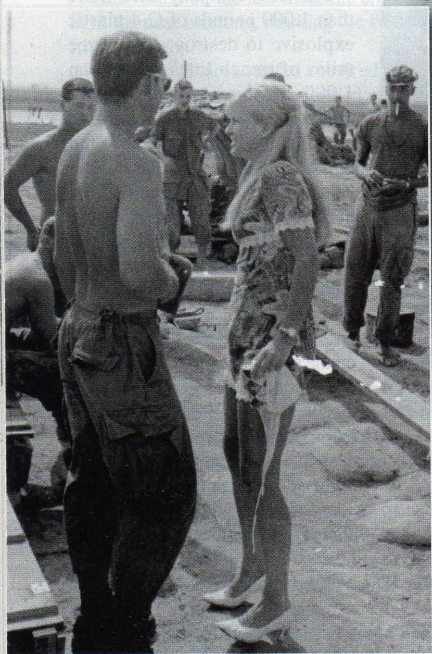


**TODAY'S HIGHS** Creative reporting of the day's high temperatures was a hit with GIs, but Bobbie Keith's Goldie Hawn-like gag struck a nerve among embassy higher-ups—who moved quickly to can repeat performances.

**MORALE BOOSTER** A visit from the miniskirted, high-heeled Bobbie the Weathergirl, here at a small 199th Light Infantry Brigade base camp, always lifted the spirits of the troops.



ALL PHOTOS, UNLESS OTHERWISE NOTED, COURTESY OF BOBBIE KEITH

# Mostly Sunny Skies with Bobbie the Weathergirl

**When a young American woman took to the air to report the weather, she raised the temperature—and stole the hearts—of thousands of GIs**

**AS THE CAMERA PANS BACK** from the miniskirted blonde in front of a U.S. weather map in a Saigon TV studio, she bids greetings to the “fellas in the 175th Radio Research Company motor pool” and purrs her signature sign off: “Until tomorrow, have a pleasant evening, weather-wise and you know, of course, otherwise.” With that, the Box Tops’ hit single “The Letter” begins to blare—“*Gimme a ticket for an aeroplane, Ain’t got time to take a fast train—*” and Bobbie the Weathergirl starts grooving to the music. Thus ended one of hundreds of Armed Forces Vietnam (AFVN) broadcasts by the young and adventurous Agency for International Development (AID) clerk and volunteer morale booster, Bobbie Keith.

Keith spent most of her childhood abroad. Her father was a veteran of World War II and Korea and was an Army intelligence officer during the Vietnam War. After finishing high school in Japan and attending two years at Sophia University in Tokyo, she returned to the States with her parents in 1966. Then, the 19-year-old in search of adventure and a way to serve her country joined AID and was off to Vietnam. Plucked from obscurity to deliver the weather report on evening AFVN news broadcasts, the vivacious Keith etched her image into the memories of hundreds of thousands of Americans serving in Vietnam from 1967 to 1969. She was a sight for sore eyes in a hostile world and provided plenty of comic relief on the air as well as in person during hundreds of trips to visit troops from the DMZ to the Delta. When Keith left Vietnam for a nearly two-decade career of globetrotting in the service of the State Department, she abandoned any notions of a TV career, but never forgot what she regarded as the greatest honor in her life, bringing a little bit of comfort to young men fighting in Vietnam. In 2008, with actress Chris Noel, Keith was awarded the Vietnam Veterans of America President’s Award for Excellence in the Arts.

Now living in Florida, Bobbie Keith continues to support Vietnam veterans and their causes and frequently speaks to young people about the American experience in Vietnam.

**MORE BOBBIE THE WEATHERGIRL  
ON [WWW.HISTORYNET.COM](http://WWW.HISTORYNET.COM)**

**Read the full interview and see  
more photographs of Bobbie Keith  
visiting troops in Vietnam.**

**View rare AFVN-TV video of  
Bobbie the Weathergirl in action.**

**Vietnam: You were 19 in 1966, and decided to get a job that would take you to Vietnam. Why did you do that?**

**Keith:** Well, I’m an Army brat, the oldest of two girls. Every member of my family served in one way or the other in the military, including my mother who was a Navy nurse in World War II. But I’m not the type that favors military structure—you know, command discipline.

AID was looking for volunteers, and working for a foreign aid project sounded more meaningful and easier to deal with. As far as my family was concerned, if you don’t do something for your country, don’t call yourself an American. There’s always a way to do something good, to serve your country.

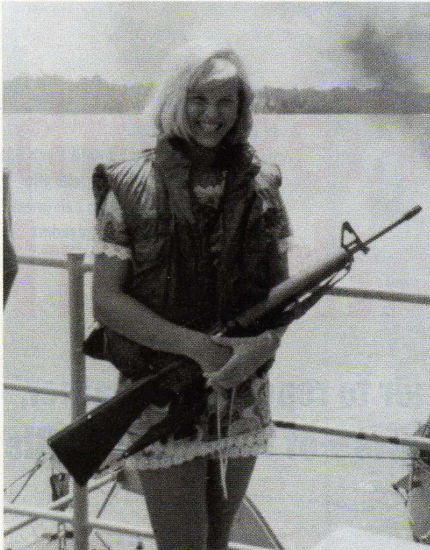
**What was the AID training like?**

Quite the opposite of what the military received. Because when the military is trained to go into a war environment, they’re kind of trained to kill. We were trained to win the hearts and minds of the people. We learned all about the country, the history, the economy, the political situation, and we got three weeks of Vietnamese language training. I sincerely believed in the program. Of course, we were thoroughly indoctrinated into the Domino Theory.

**Any surprises or second thoughts after you got there in April 1967?**

It was a lot more modern than I had anticipated. Saigon had beauty parlors, French restaurants, nightclubs, dressmaking places. There was the culture shock when I first arrived and then dysentery—“Ho Chi Minh’s Revenge.”

The third week I was there, I was out on the balcony when a rocket came in and hit the street. That’s when I’m thinking “Holy crackers, this is reality.” Even though you’re living comfortably in a modern city, you’re still very vulnerable. When the rocket hit, I watched a lady on the street pick up the body of a child and run off. I have always wondered whether that child survived. It’s a really weird scene when you can be on a rooftop, having a steak dinner, sipping a gin and tonic and watching tracers go up and hear helicopters whooshing around. There’s a war going on! How do you make sense of the surreal?



**ARMED AND DANGEROUS** Keith, aboard the Brown Water Navy's LST *Garrett County* while patrolling in the Mekong Delta, sent this snapshot to her parents back home.

**SPECIAL DELIVERY** The men of the carrier *Enterprise* had another reason to celebrate when Keith arrived on deck to spend the 1969 Fourth of July weekend with them.

**What was your job with AID and did you enjoy it?**

It was a clerical job, keeping track of secret documents. I enjoyed the job but I enjoyed the people more. Everyone was so dedicated and worked long, hard hours. No one complained.

**How did you get the weathergirl job?**

It was an accident. I mean I think it could've happened to anybody. About six months after I got to Vietnam, I was having lunch at the international house on Nguyen Hue Street with my girlfriends, and Colonel Ray Nash came over to the table and said, "You look like a weathergirl." I thought it was a joke. I later learned that he asked about 20 women to the studio to be interviewed.

**Had you seen the show on Armed Forces TV?**

No. Never watched it. I never had a TV. I think that if I had seen myself on TV I might not have done it. We listened to music. My apartment building was all AID employees, so we would usually get together and have dinner. It wasn't a habit for us to watch TV.

**What did you do for entertainment?**

They showed movies at the BEQ and BOQs. And then there was the Pineapple Palace, where all the reporters would come in and you could get the scoop of what was going on in Vietnam. It was actually combat photographer Al Chang's apartment and all the reporters and photographers would be there. He was Hawaiian and would play the ukulele and some of the girls from the embassy would do the hula. We'd have a little Hawaiian party. It was great



because you'd sit in there and hear all the newspaper reporters tell their stories.

**What was it like in the middle of Saigon during Tet?**

The Cholon section of the city got hit bad, and I worked at the AID annex there. We couldn't go to work, so the girls all got together and we worked in the mess halls. We made up box lunches to take out to the troops. When my friend Pat Zanella and I went out to the hospital, the Viet Cong started shooting out of a theater across the street and we had to take refuge. Later, when we got in a Jeep and went farther out to take food to an engineer battalion, VC jumped out of a garbage heap and started shooting the place up. That's when you start going: "Gee mom, I want to go home. I'm not sure I can

## 'Can you imagine being in a country with 500,000 brothers. How lucky can someone be?'

handle this." I think we went back that night and downed a few gin and tonics.

### We all know what happened, but what did Tet look like to you at the time?

People there all looked at this as a desperate action by the Viet Cong. We won, but the publicity that came out of Tet was misread to the American public. We didn't lose Tet. The television war lost it in a way.

### Was Tet the most frightening experience you had?

I guess because it was so close to home. But when I was visiting the Marines at Quang Tri, the base came under attack, and I had to stay in a bunker. I felt protected by the Marines, but at the same time the fact was the enemy had penetrated the perimeter of the area and you're left with the unknown. During the 1969 May offensive, the VC lobbed rockets into Saigon every single morning for 30 days. No one needed an alarm clock. I used to kick the mattress off my bed and jump in the bathtub with it. You think, okay, the building can get hit and demolished, but I'm going to be safe in my bathtub under my mattress.

### How did things change for you after you started the TV job?

When I arrived in Saigon working for AID, I did have some profile simply because there weren't a lot of American women around. But when I started the TV show, my profile was greatly elevated. I couldn't go to many places without people watching everything I did. When you're out in public and people clap when you get up to go to the bathroom, it's kind of embarrassing. The experiences I had because of the show were invaluable. I mean, I wasn't paid, but it was worth more than a million dollars, because I got to see the men and the country, from the DMZ to the Delta. One of the best things I ever did with my girlfriends a few times, was fly in helicopters out of Long Binh or Ton Son Nhut down to the Delta and deliver mail to the guys. It was very heartwarming.

### So, as Bobbie the Weathergirl, you frequently visited troops in the field?

Almost every weekend I had something I was invited to do. It wasn't obligatory. It was left up to me. They'd say: "The Cav would like you to come out and see them on Saturday. They'll put you up overnight." When I went out to see the 1st Cavalry, they made me an honorary member. I still go to their meetings and reunions. Holy Toledo! It's quite a compliment to be remembered from 40 years ago. After flying in a cobra helicopter, they made me an honorary member of the Blue Max Battalion. And then there was the 199th Light Infantry that guarded the perimeter of Saigon. I visited the 199th probably most often. The Navy took me out to the USS *Enterprise* for one July Fourth weekend; it was unbelievable. They posted a Marine guard at my door, but I don't think I needed to be protected. It's like I could be in the field and be the only girl with a thousand troops, and I had no fear, because they were all gentlemen.



COURTESY OF DICK ELLIS

**SCREEN TEST** Keith strikes a pose on her first day on the AFVN weather set, influenced by the "mod" style taking hold in 1967. Over time, Bobbie the Weathergirl's bit became much more animated and studded with gags.

### Were you ever asked why were you there when you didn't have to be?

It was more like, "What are you doing here? Are you crazy?" Occasionally you'd get someone with an attitude like, "You don't belong here." It would come from men who wanted to keep their women protected, because in those days, remember, they didn't allow women in combat. A couple of times I did go into an environment where it was shocking for me and shocking for the men too. On one occasion, the guys had just been pulled in for a stand down after being out in the bush for a long time and they didn't expect to see a woman. And it kind of upset them.

### Did you often think that some of these guys you're out visiting would probably be wounded or killed shortly after you left?

You tried to erase that part of the process. I remember flying over to Con Son Island where the guys from the LST and PBR boats from down in the Delta would go for a one day R&R. We'd enjoy a fabulous steak cookout on a beautiful sandy white beach, then I could jump back on the plane for the relative safety of Saigon—while they would have to head back to the war zone in the Delta. It hits you, but you try to bury everything. That was our coping mechanism. You eat your steak, you sip your gin and tonic, you watch the flares, you hear the helicopters—and you try to ignore



COURTESY OF PAUL BALDRIDGE

**HOMETOWN WEATHER** Keith primps in front of a U.S. weather map, as the studio crew counts down to begin the show, which was seen by AFVN-TV as one way to keep troops connected to their homes back in the States.

it. I'll tell you something really weird about the whole thing, there is not one person I know who served in Vietnam who doesn't get goose bumps when they hear the roaring blades of a helicopter.

**Clearly you were you a sex symbol, right?**

The guys at the station treated me with a lot of respect. I think of all of those people as my big brothers. I never thought of myself as being a sex symbol. I was treated more like the girl the guys left behind. I wore White Shoulders perfume back in those days and the guys would say, "Oh my girlfriend wears that...that reminds me of my girlfriend." I was reminding the guys of their loved ones they left behind. I don't think anyone ever treated me as a sex symbol. No. Even when they did the pin-ups. I was just there, an American girl.

**Were you ever criticized for doing the show?**

Well, yeah, there were a couple of occasions, when they painted the temperatures on my body. I don't think any of us thought of it as being sexist, as even being cheeky. I didn't know it at the time, but it was a take-off of Goldie Hawn on the TV show *Laugh-In*. Somebody—I think in Ambassador Ellsworth Bunker's office—took offense, so they put an end to that.

**The weather report was really more of a vehicle for humor and a way to put some fun into the broadcast?**

**'With the tragedy going on around us, we wanted to laugh—and get others to laugh with us'**

That's what we tried to do. I think that maybe the powers that be wanted things to be a little more serious. We found out that someone got a little offended about the "Weatherwise and otherwise" sign off. You never know what's going to offend people. One time I wore the jacket of a uniform that was given to me with military paraphernalia on it. I wanted to honor the guys who gave it to me. Now, the jacket probably came past my knees, but I didn't have the bottoms on. Well, somebody called in and raised hell about that. It was ironic because the jacket was much longer than the miniskirts I usually wore!

**So, who came up with the "Weatherwise and otherwise" line?**

That was Paul Baldrige. He was a very straight arrow too, not sexist at all. He's like my big adorable brother. The men really protected me like their kid sister.

**Any idea how many broadcasts you did?**

Hundreds, if you figure six or seven days a week. Even when I wasn't there on weekends; we taped them in advance.

**How did you do the weather report in advance?**

I'd take a few changes of clothing and we'd mix up the numbers. The temperature never really changed. It was hot, or it was hotter than hot. During monsoon season, you could say 60 percent chance of rain, or it will rain today at 2 and it probably would. So I could go away for a few days and we would tape in advance.

**You did a lot of gags on air, what were the funniest?**

The guys were always playing tricks on me so I'd flub my lines. The first time they poured a bucket of water on me, they had to turn off my mike because I turned around and I think I cussed. It surprised and scared me because the microphone was attached to my clothing, and I didn't know if I would get electrocuted or not. I never knew when they were going to do something. One Halloween they had me fly around in a harness on a broomstick, and one time I rode a motorcycle—I almost fell off. We had a series of gags, and then I think they got to the point where someone said they're getting a bit corny, but we didn't think of it that way. With all the tragedies going on around us, we wanted to laugh and we wanted others to laugh with us—how else can you escape the fear that comes from being in a war zone?

**You often closed the show with a personalized message or music request.**

That started when men began writing in, asking me to mention their hometown, or play a certain song. "Proud Mary" was one of the most popular songs then, and guys would call in and say, "We want to see you do the Kick." The sign off was usually to honor someone or a group of men I went to visit.

**Were you emulating anyone or you were just making it up?**

Adlibbing mostly. When I started on the show, I was sitting down and

had a pointer and there wasn't a lot of mobility. Then they suggested that maybe standing up with a pointer was better. Then they started putting the music in. The dancing at the end was adlibbed too.

**You danced to end each show?**

Yes, until the very end, and this is when I was winding down. I think that's when somebody may have said, "She can't do this anymore, she can't say 'This is Bobbie saying goodnight, weatherwise and otherwise. Have a good time.'" I had instructions to stop saying that and to turn it over to an anchorperson, who would do the sign off.

**At the time, did you realize that you had one of the highest profiles of any woman in Vietnam?**

I guess I realized it when I was getting invited to do all these things. You're invited not because of who you are... You're invited because you're on TV. That I recognize. And I'm very thankful for that. It made my tour of duty much more rewarding than had I just been in an office in Saigon. But, there was no place I could go without being recognized. You try to keep a low profile because you don't want to be embarrassed. It's like, when I was just walking to get my seat at a Bob Hope show, the whole place roared. There must have been 20,000 in that stadium. I could have absolutely died! But my salvation was when they saw me sit down, the guys came over and said, "Bobbie, we would love for you to come sit with us." So rather than sit as a guest, I went and sat with the troops.

**How does it feel to know hundreds of thousands of men have you tucked away as one of their good memories of Vietnam?**

It's hard for me to comprehend. When a friend told me how he would watch me on TV, it was surprising; something I didn't expect. Even when I get letters and pictures now, I'm honored and flattered.

**Why did you have such a lasting impact?**

I was flipping channels one night and stumbled on a documentary, about the TV history of the war, and the narrator said something like, "When America goes to war, we take our culture and comforts with us." And, then he says: "Never has it been as absurd as in Vietnam... and the absurdities are numerous... And here comes Bobbie the Weathergirl. They even had to show the weather back home!" So, I am an absurdity! What they don't know is that guys wanted to hear about home. They would watch for these little things that would connect them to their homes.

**You decided to leave your AID job and Vietnam in November 1969. Anything in particular happen to**



**CHANCE OF RAIN** AFVN-TV's Paul Baldrige pulls a favorite stunt, especially during monsoon season, as Keith gives the prediction for precipitation. Typically, she was taken by surprise by the drenchings.

**make you think, "This is it, I'm out of here"?**

I think some of it might have been when I'd hear people say we were pulling out and the talk about the morale of the troops and suddenly you feel disillusioned and you're wondering, I don't know how to say this, if it's a no-win situation.

**Where did you go when you left Vietnam?**

I went on a "sanity sabbatical." I loved Kathmandu and went there first, then I stayed in Delhi and from there I was talked into going to Israel and wound up working on a kibbutz. From there, I went to Turkey for a while and then went to work and live in Greece. Then on to Dakar, Senegal, and then Germany. I did not return home until 1974.

**Then you went back into government work?**

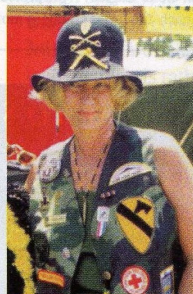
I went to Washington and got a job in the State Department. In 1975 I went back to Germany and from there had posts in Jordan, Paris, Turkey, Columbia and Morocco. I finally returned to the U.S. in 1989. I didn't even know about the Vietnam Memorial until I came back and worked at the State Department. I started volunteering at the Wall, helping people locate names or answer questions.

**You continue to work with veterans in Florida now?**

In Brevard County we have one of the largest Vietnam Veterans reunions each April. They come from all over, including foreign countries, and camp out. It's like being back in Vietnam. A very caring, generous group of veterans here also run a transitional center to take care of any vets who need help, a place to stay, a meal.

**What do you tell veterans when you meet up with them today?**

There are so many untold stories from those who were there, and I tell them they should take the time to document their stories. I know it was a tremendous experience in my life. ☆



**STILL THE ONE** Keith is a big advocate for—and favorite of—veterans.